

# CONFESSION OF SIN ILLUSTRATED BY THE CASES OF DR. PRITCHARD AND CONSTANCE KENT

## NO. 641

A SERMON  
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 23, 1865,  
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*“I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess  
my transgressions unto the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”*  
*Psalms 32:5.*

DAVID’S grief for sin was long and terrible; its effects were visible upon his outward frame; “His bones waxed old.” “His moisture was turned into the drought of summer.” No remedy could he find until he made a full confession before the throne of heavenly grace. He tells us, that for a time he kept silent, and then his heart became more and more filled with grief—like some mountain lake whose outlet is blocked up, his soul was swollen with torrents of sorrow. He dreaded to confront his sin. He fashioned excuses; he endeavored to divert his thoughts by giving his mind to the cares of his kingdom or the pleasures of his court, but it was all to no purpose; the rankling arrow made the wound bleed anew, and made the gash more wide and deep every day. Like a festering sore, his anguish gathered and increased, and as he would not use the lancet of confession, his spirits became more and more full of torment, and there was no rest in his bones because of sin. At last it came to this, that he must return unto his God in humble penitence, or he must die outright; so he hastened to the mercy seat, and there unrolled the volume of his iniquities before the eyes of the all-seeing One, acknowledging all the evil of his ways in language such as you read in the 51<sup>st</sup> and other penitential Psalms. Having done this, a work so simple and yet so difficult to pride, he received at once the token of divine forgiveness; the bones which had been broken were made to rejoice, and he came forth from his closet to sing the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.

See, dear friends, the value of a truthful grace-worked confession of sin; it is to be prized above all price, for he who confesses his sin and forsakes it, shall find mercy. Now, it is a well known fact that when God is pleased to bestow upon men any choice gift, Satan, who is the god of counterfeits, is sure to very soon produce a base imitation, true in appearance, but worthless in reality—his object is deception, and full often he succeeds. How many there are who have made a worthless confession, and yet are relying upon it as though it were a work of divine grace; they have come before God as a matter of form, and have said, “Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.” And having done so, they imagine that they have received divine absolution, when alas, alas, it is easy to be deceived, and difficult to cultivate within one’s heart that genuine repentance which is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

May God grant us His gracious assistance while we describe two widely different sorts of confession which have been very vividly brought before us during the past week, and then, we will have a few words upon the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy which is vested in God, who gives forgiveness to those whose confession is sincere.

**I.** Let me set before you TWO SORTS OF CONFESSIONS. At this present moment, unhappily, two persons are lying under sentence of death for murders of the most atrocious character. Without wishing to say a single word with regard to the state of the soul of either of these persons—for into that it is no business of mine to pry—it seems to me that the published reports of their cases may very properly furnish us with *types* of two sorts of persons. It is remarkable that two such cases as those of Dr. Pritchard and Constance Kent should be before the public eye at the same moment and that the points of contrast in their confessions should be so exceedingly clear. I cannot but hope and pray that we may gather some few lessons of warning from crimes which have, no doubt, exercised a great influence for evil upon the masses of our country.

The confession which has been made by Dr. PRITCHARD may be taken as a specimen of those which are full often made by impenitent sinners, and which can never be regarded as acceptable before the throne of the Most High. Here is a man who is accused of the atrocious crime of murdering his wife and his mother-in-law, and when he answers to the indictment, we are not astonished to hear him plead, “*Not Guilty!*” I am far from being severe upon him for so pleading, but viewing him as a *type*, I would remind you that thousands of those who call themselves “miserable sinners” in our public services, if they were called to plead before the bar of God, would have the effrontery to say, “Not Guilty.” They might not use the exact words, very probably they would use terms having the opposite meaning, but their *heart-plea* would be, “*Not guilty.*” If they had the law of God explained to them, and they were questioned upon each commandment—“Have you broken this? Have you broken that?”—though ready enough to confess in the gross that they have sinned, when it came to details, they would be for denying all.

We have heard of a woman who readily allowed that she was a sinner. “O yes, sir, we are all sinners; just so, sir.” But when the visitor sat down and opened the Bible, and pointing to the commandment, said, “Have you ever had any other God save the Lord?”—she did not know that she ever had. “Had she ever taken God’s name in vain?” “O dear no, sir, I never did anything so wicked.” Each precept was explained, and she very positively claimed that she had not broken it. She had not violated the Sabbath; she had not killed anybody; she had not committed adultery; she had not borne false witness, or coveted anything. She was altogether, in every detail, innocent—though on the whole, she was quite willing to say as other people, “Oh, yes! I am a sinner! Of course, sir, we are all sinners!” which, being interpreted, means, “I am ready to say anything you may like to put into my mouth, but I do not believe a syllable of it.” The inward speech of the unconverted man is, “I am not guilty.” Ask the unhumiliated transgressor, “Are you worthy of God’s wrath?” and his proud heart replies, “I am not.” “Are you worthy to be cast away forever from God’s presence on account of sin?” and the unbroken, uncontrite soul replies, “I am not; I am no thief, nor adulterer, nor extortioner; I have not sinned as yonder publican has done. I thank God that I am not as other men are.” Man pleads, “Not Guilty,” and yet all the while within his heart, so proud and boastful, there may readily be discerned abundant evidence of abounding sin. The leprosy is white upon his unclean brow, and yet the man claims to be sound and whole. If there were no other evidence against us, the very pride which boasts of innocence would be sufficient to convict us of sin, and will be so when we are taught right reason by the Holy Spirit.

The guilty man whose case we are now looking upon as an illustration, *endeavored, as a means of defense for himself, to involve another in the dreadful guilt and punishment of his atrocious sin.* There were very distinct signs that he would have been perfectly satisfied if the woman who had ministered to his sinful pleasures had been accused and condemned of the crime for which he alone was guilty. Certainly this is the case with the great mass of those who are compelled to acknowledge their sins. Our first parent could not deny that he had taken of the forbidden fruit, but he laid the blame upon Eve—“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” Ah Adam! Where is your manliness? Where is your love to your spouse, that you would involve in the ruin her who was bone of your bone so as to escape yourself? And she! She will not take the blame for a moment, but it is the serpent; she casts all the sin on him. In this first case of sin, the attempt was less atrocious than in that of the prisoner before us, because there was real guilt both in the woman and in the serpent, while it does not appear that the servant girl in Pritchard’s family had any share in the poisoning. However, the human heart is such, that, if we could really throw all the shame and blame of sin upon another who was perfectly innocent; there would be a strong temptation to do so, if we might by such means be considered innocent. No, let me show that Adam virtually did that, for he said, “The woman whom *You* gave me,” thus virtually laying the blame of his rebellious deed upon God Himself! And God, what hand had He in Adam’s eating of the fruit of the accursed tree? It was an act of Adam’s free will—he did as he pleased concerning it, and the Most Holy God could in no sense be made partaker of his transgression. Yet, think of it! He would sooner that the great God, who is hymned of angels as the thrice Holy One, should bear the fault of his iniquity than he would bear it himself!

Such are we naturally. We may bend the knee, and say we are miserable sinners, but unless the grace of God has taught us to make a true confession, we are always for shifting the burden to some other shoulder, and making it out that, after all, though nominally miserable sinners, we are not so bad as a

great many other people, and have a deal saddled upon us which really is no fault of ours, but belongs to providence, to fate, to our fellow men, to the devil, to the weather, and I know not what besides!

The convicted criminal who stands before us in our picture *made no confession whatever until the case was proved and sentence pronounced*. The case was clear enough, but he did his best to make it difficult; had he been completely free from the crime, his bearing and tone could have been scarcely more confident when asserting his innocence. I admit that it was very natural that he should not aid to convict himself. It is because it is so natural that the man serves so admirably as a representative of human nature when it makes its impenitent confessions. When it could not avail the wretch to withhold the truth, when facts were brought out so clearly, when the jury had decided, when the judge had pronounced sentence, then, and not till then, he yielded to tears and entreaties, and proffered a confession, such as it was. So is it always with unregenerate humanity; though cognizant of sin, we only acknowledge before the Lord that which is too glaring to be denied. Sin may be held up before the eyes of the man who is guilty of it, and often he will disown his own offspring or assert that it is not what God's Word declares it to be. Holy Scripture accuses us of a thousand sins which we practically claim to be innocent of, for we flatter ourselves that the Bible puts too harsh a construction upon our actions, and that we are not what it declares us to be. When our fellow men concur in censuring our fault, we are compelled to blush, but of what value is a repentance which owes its existence to the overwhelming testimony of our fellow offenders against us? This force-work is far removed from the free and ready acknowledgments of a man whose heart is touched by divine grace, and melted by the love of Jesus. When men are upon their dying beds, when the ghosts of their iniquities haunt them, when the red hand of guilt draws the curtain, when they can almost hear the sentence of the Last Judgment, *then* they will make a confession—but may we not fear that it is of little value since it is wrung and extorted from them by fear of hell, and horror of the wrath to come? True repentance worked in us by the Holy Spirit, drops as freely as honey drops from the comb, but merely natural confessions are like the worst of the wine squeezed by force from the dregs. O dear friends, God deliver you from ungracious confessions of sin, and enable you to sincerely repent at the foot of Jesus' cross!

When the confession came in the case before us, it was *very partial*. He had killed one, but he professed himself guiltless of the other's death. Villain as he was, on his own showing he could go the length of admitting half his crime, but then he started back and acted the liar. No, she died by accident, and he, to avoid being charged unjustly—innocent creature as he was—had put the poison in the bottle afterwards. He had the wickedness to fake wonderment that his tale was not believed, and likened those who doubted him to those who would not believe the Lord of Glory. Now, the confessions of unregenerate men are precisely of this sort. They will go the length of acknowledging, if they have been drinking, or if they have broken the laws of the state, "Yes, we have offended here." But the great mass of sins against God are not confessed, nor allowed to be sins at all. Men will often lay a stress upon sins of which they are not conspicuously guilty, and omit those which are the most glaring. What unrenewed man thinks it a sin to forget God, to forsake the Creator's fountain of living waters for the cisterns of the creature, or to live without God in the world? And yet, these are the most crying of all iniquities. To rob God of His glory, to despise His Son, to disbelieve the gospel, to live for self, to be self-righteous—all these are heinous evils, but what carnal man admits as much? Covetousness! Again, who ever confesses that? Thousands are guilty of it, but few will admit it, even in private before the Lord. No confession will be acceptable before God unless you are willing to make a clean breast of the whole of your evil ways, words, and thoughts, before the Searcher of Hearts! I do not wonder if you should fail to tell others your offenses; it were not meet you should do so except when you have offended them, and may make retribution by the confession; but before God, you must open all, you must roll away the stone from the mouth of that sepulcher even though your iniquity, like Lazarus, should stink. There must be no mincing the matter, things must be called by their right names; you must be willing to feel the horrible sinfulness of sin, and as far as you can, you must descend to the very bottom of its terrible guiltiness, and acknowledge its blackness, its heinousness, its devilry, its abomination. No confession will be acceptable before God if you knowingly and willfully gloss over any sin; if you make any exceptions, or are partial with respect to any form of iniquity; that confession which hides some sins, and only confesses certain others, stops one leak in the soul, and opens another.

Nor ought it to be forgotten, that *when the criminal had confessed his sin, yet still in the last confession*—which we may suppose to have been true, *there are words of extenuation and nothing to indicate any deep and suitable sensibility of his great transgression.* He hints at reasons why he was scarcely accountable—a sort of madness and the influence of strong drink must be blamed for the crime, and not the man himself. O God, You know how often in our natural confessions, before Your grace met with us, we made wretched and mean excuses for ourselves! We said that a strong temptation overcame us; it was an unguarded moment; it was our constitution and our besetting sins; it was our friend who led us astray; it was God's providence which tried us; it was anything rather than ourselves—we were to blame, no doubt, but still there were extenuating circumstances. Beloved friends! A man can never make a true confession till he feels that sin is his own sin, and is willing to confess it as such; he must cease to apologize, and must just stand forth before the Lord, and cry, "I have sinned willfully and infamously, and here, standing in Your presence, I acknowledge it—and if a word of apology could save my soul, I dare not utter it, for I should again be guilty of a lie." May this teach us to seek out rather the aggravations of our sin than fancied extenuations of it. Try to see the worst of your case, sinner, rather than to gloss it or gild it over and make it seem better than it is.

All this, remember, was committed by this miserable murderer, who is soon to appear before his God, not through ignorance, *but in spite of a clear consciousness of the wrong of his deed.* Had he been some person of a low mental organization, or of neglected intellect, there might be some plea. If, for instance, he had never been able to read, and had received his only education amid thieves and vagabonds, there might have been some excuse, and we might have said, "It is the sin of the community which fails to provide moral and religious instruction for the people." But here is a man who knows better, who, I suppose, had listened to thousands of sermons, had a knowledge of the Bible, had pretended to pray, was well taught as to the matter of right and wrong. And yet still, in defiance of all this, he sins, and to make matters worse, he shows no signs of softening of heart, no tenderness, no melting, nothing of deep regret, shame, contrition, or humbleness of heart, but is, apparently (I say no more) as stubborn in confessing his guilt as when he was denying it. Ah, but there are too many who make confession, having no broken hearts, no streaming eyes, no flowing tears, no humbled spirits. Know this, that ten thousand confessions, if they are made by hardened hearts, if they do not spring from really contrite spirits shall be only additions to your guilt as they are mockeries before the Most High. Let these suffice as remarks upon an unacceptable confession. Oh Lord, let Your Holy Spirit give to the guilty one, of whom we have been speaking, and to us all, that broken and contrite heart which You will accept through Jesus Christ!

The second case must now come before us, and here again I do not desire to speak anything about the state of the heart of CONSTANCE KENT. I only speak of her outward act, and only of that as a symbol of true confession. Here is one avowedly guilty of a most atrocious murder, a very great and terrible crime; but when she appears in court she is brought there upon her own confession; her life was in no danger from the witness of other people. She surrendered herself voluntarily, and when she stood before the judge, *she pleaded guilty.* No doubt her anxious friends had suggested to her the desirableness of pleading, "Not guilty," hoping to save her life by failure in the evidence, or plea of insanity, or some other legal method of saving criminals from the gallows. Mark, however, how distinctly she says, "Guilty." And though the question is repeated and time is given her to retract, her reply is still the one self-condemning word, "GUILTY!" Even so before the Lord, whenever we come to confess, we must approach Him with this cry, "*Guilty. Guilty!* Lord, I cannot say anything else. If hell is my eternal portion for it, I dare say no other. The stones in the streets would cry out against me if I denied my guilt. When my memory shows me the record of my days, its truthful witness is that I have broken Your law; and when my conscience looks at the way in which I have transgressed, it cannot say anything but this, 'You have willfully broken God's law, and you deserve His wrath.'" Now sinner, you shall never be at peace with God until you are unreservedly willing to plead, "Guilty." That self-righteous spirit of yours must be cast out as though it were the very devil, for it is next akin to the devil, and is quite as evil, and you must be brought down humbly to lie at the foot of Jehovah's throne and confess that you do richly deserve His wrath. You have defied His righteous law, and sinned against Him with a high hand. You must plead, "Guilty," or remain guilty forever! You shall never find pardon through Jesus Christ till you are willing, truly and really, to admit yourself a sinner.

Constance Kent was *anxious to free all others from the blame of her sin*. Her counsel says, in open court, “Solemnly, in the presence of Almighty God, as a person who values her own soul, she wishes me to say that the guilt is her own alone; and that her father and others who have so long suffered most unjust and cruel suspicions, are wholly and absolutely innocent.” This is well spoken. I know nothing of this young woman’s heart, but using her as an illustration rather than an example, we are safe in saying that it is a very blessed sign of true repentance when the sinner cries out with David, “I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done *this* evil in Your sight.” There will be, in a gracious penitent, no attempt to lay the blame upon the tempter, or upon providence; no dwelling upon circumstances, the suddenness of the temptation, or the hastiness of one’s temper. “Oh God,” says the sinner, “I *myself* have sinned; I have nothing in the world that is so my own as my own sin. For this my sin, I alone am accountable, and I feel it, and I cannot, I dare not accuse anyone else with being guilty of *my* sin. I must stand in my own place before You, O God, even if that involves my eternal ruin.” It will never do for you to lay the blame on your mothers and fathers because they did not teach you better, upon the minister for not being earnest enough, or upon your employer for telling you to do wrong. It is true that we may be partakers of your sins in a measure, but if you are sincerely penitent, the guilt which will strike you will not be another man’s guilt, or another man’s share in your sin, but your own guilt. A sinner has not been brought truly before the Lord in humble contrition unless his cry is, “Lord! I have sinned. I have sinned so as to be guilty *myself*, in *my own person*. Have mercy upon *me!*”

The unhappy young woman now condemned to die *needed no witness to come forward to prove her guilt* and assure her conviction. No one saw the deed; it was done so secretly that the most expert detectives were not able to find a satisfactory clue to the mystery. There may be collateral evidence to support her confession; it may, or it may not be true that her conviction would now have been certain had her confession been retracted; but she did not need that, for without any voice of man to witness, she witnessed against herself. It will never suffice for us merely to confess to the Lord what other people have seen, and to feel guilty because we know that the case is reported in the neighborhood. Many people who have fallen into sin, have felt very penitent because they knew they would damage their names, or lose their employment; but to have your private sin brought before you by conscience, and voluntarily, without any pressure but the burden of sin itself and the work of the Holy Spirit, to come before God and say, “Lord, You know in this matter I have offended, and though none saw me except Your eyes and mine; yet Your eyes might well flash with anger at me, while mine shall be wet with many a tear of penitence on account of it”—that is what you need. Sinner, you must come before God now and let out your heart without any external pressure. Spontaneously must your soul flow out, poured out like water before the Lord, or you must not hope that He will pardon you.

*She confessed all.* It was a solemn moment when the judge said, “I must repeat to you, that you are charged with having willfully, intentionally, and with malice killed and murdered your brother. Are you guilty or not guilty?” Yes, she was guilty, just as the judge had put it. She did not object to those words which made the case come out so black. The willfulness?—yes, she acknowledged that. The intention, the malice?—yes, all that. The killing, the murdering—was it just murder?—was it nothing less? No, nothing else. Not a word of extenuation. She acknowledges all, just as the judge puts it. She is guilty in very deed of the whole charge. Sinner, will you confess sin as God puts it? Many will confess sin after their own fashion, but will you confess it as *God* puts it? Are you brought to see sin as God sees it? As far as mortal eye could bear that dreadful sight, and do you confess now just what God lays at your door—that you have been His enemy, a traitor, full of evil, covered with iniquity? Will you confess that you have crucified His dear Son, and have in all ways deserved His hottest wrath and displeasure—will you plead guilty to that? If not, you shall have no pardon; but if you will do this, He is merciful and just to forgive you your sins through Jesus the great atoning sacrifice.

*She had not*, nor had her counsel for her, *a single word to say by way of excuse*; in fact, at her request, one supposed excuse was utterly discarded—“She wishes me to say that she was not driven to this act, as has been asserted, by unkind treatment at home, as she met with nothing there but tender and forbearing love.” Her counsel might have said she was very young—it was hoped that her youth might plead for her. Being young, she might be readily led astray by an evil passion—might not that excuse her? It was long ago, and her confession was her own; she had brought herself there into that dock—

might not this be a reason for mercy? Nothing of the kind; the judge might think so if he pleased, but there was nothing said for her about that, nor did she desire that it should be suggested. She might secretly hope, but her confession was so thorough, that there was not a single word to sully its clear stream. So, sinner, if you come before God, you must not say, “Lord, I am to be excused because of my position—I was in poverty, and I was tempted to steal.” Or, “I had been in bad company, and so I learned to blaspheme.” Or, “I had a hard employer, and so I was driven to sin to find some pleasure there.” No; if you are really penitent, you will find no reason whatever why you should have sinned, except the evil of your own heart—and that you will plead as an aggravation, not as an excuse. “Guilty! Guilty! Guilty! I am, O God, before Your face, guilty; I offer no excuse, no extenuation. You must deal with me upon pure mercy, if You do save me, for justice can only award me my well-deserved doom.”

Notice that when she was asked whether she had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon her, there was still a solemn silence. Was there no reason to be given why the dreadful sentence of being hanged by the neck until dead should not be passed upon a young and weeping girl? She did not so much as hint at one. I remember well the time when I thought there was no reason why the flames of hell should not consume me, and why the crushing weight of God’s wrath should not roll over me forever and forever. I think every sinner who has really come to Christ, has been made to feel that however angry God may be with sin, He is not one whit too angry. Until we know the power of divine grace, we read in the Bible concerning eternal punishment, and we think it is too heavy and too hard, and we are apt to kick against it, and look for some heretic or other who will teach us another doctrine. But when the soul is really quickened by divine grace, and made to feel the weight of sin, it thinks the bottomless pit none too deep, and the punishment of hell none too severe for sin such as it has committed. This is not the emotion of a mind rendered morbid by sickness, but these are the genuine workings of God the Holy Spirit in the soul, bringing the man to stand guilty before the Lord, with his mouth closed, not able to say a word against the sentence of divine justice. May God bring such there who have never been there yet!

In the confession, as we read the story, there was *much tenderness*. I do not wonder that the judge exhibited deep emotion—who could help it? Remember, I am not pretending to know her heart, I am only judging the externals; as far as externals went there seemed to be a great brokenness of spirit. She appeared really to know what guilt meant, and to stand there with this resolve upon her soul, that though she could not make any atonement for her crime, she would acknowledge it honestly, and accordingly she confessed it as one who felt within her own soul the terrible weight of her guilt. This is the manner in which we must stand before God if we would find mercy. It is all very well for us to use fine language, but words alone are worthless. Those words which come fresh from your lips, dictated by your own heart, because the Holy Spirit is there, will suffice if the heart is in them. It is to the contrite that the promise is given. Look to Jesus for contrition, for without it, there is no pardon.

**II.** Thus we have tried, as far as we could, to bring out the distinctions which pertain to confessions, and now let us have a word or two upon THE EXERCISE OF THE PREROGATIVE OF MERCY ON GOD’S PART.

“You forgave the iniquity of my sin.” In every case where there is a genuine, gracious confession, mercy is freely given. There is a notion abroad that confession deserves mercy. We read in the papers such remarks as these, “expiating sin by confession,” or, “made such atonement as he could by confessing his sin.” Confession makes no atonement in any shape whatever. There is not one single word in that law which I read to you this morning, in the 20<sup>th</sup> of Exodus, about the possibility of taking away sin by mere confession. Justice has but one rule, and that is, *sin must be punished*. If the sinner violates law, law, in the case of man, may excuse the penalty, but in the case of God, *never*. The attributes of God are not like the qualities of man, they never come into collision with one another, nor do they abridge the sphere of each other. The justice of God is as awful and all-reaching as if He had not a grain of mercy, while the mercy of God is as unrestrained and almighty as if He were utterly unjust. The reason why sin can be forgiven in the case of a penitent sinner is because for that sinner, Jesus Christ has borne the full weight of all the wrath which his sin deserves. The fire cloud of Jehovah’s wrath was waiting for the sinner—the sinner must receive the whole of its dread discharge; but for every sinner who repents and believes in Him, Christ stood beneath that terrible cloud, and all the lightning was discharged on *Him*. Christ suffered as incarnate God, all the chastisement which was due to His people. The grief of our

Savior we can never tell—the woes of Gethsemane and Gabbatha and Golgotha are not to be expressed, but they were accepted by God in the place of all the suffering and grief which the law most righteously claimed on every law-breaker. And now, through what Christ Jesus has done, the eternal mercy of God comes streaming forth in perfect consistency with justice. Mercy provided the great substitute, and now mercy, with loving heart, calls upon repenting and believing sinners, and assures them that all sin is put away through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Let every sinner know, then, that although his repentance does not deserve mercy, the God of love has been pleased to promise free pardon to all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, because Christ deserves it! Pardon is given to penitent sinners as a matter of justice, as well as mercy, because of the throes and grief, and agonies of the divine Redeemer.

How consistent it is with the nature of things that penitent sinners and penitent sinners only, should obtain mercy through Jesus Christ! When you read the story of the man who made no confession till it was forced out of him, although you can respond to his wish, “Fellow creatures, pray for me,” you cannot feel much sympathy, if any, with him. His conduct seems to harden one’s heart against him, not merely because of his guilt, but because of the lie of his confession. But, when you read the other story—although it contains no request to pray, you find you do not need one, for your heart cries at once—“Father, forgive her!” And you think within yourself, “If the prerogative of mercy can be exercised in this case, let it be.” If it were put to a show of hands of all our country whether the law should be executed on Constance Kent, I think we would all say, “Let the penitent sinner live.” Great was her offense, and no excuse is to be offered for her, as she offers none for herself. It was a great and dreadful crime which must be a blight upon her all her days, yet, let her be spared, for she has confessed most fully—not on the ground of justice, but on the ground that this seems to be a case in which, if the prerogative of mercy is to be sovereignly exercised at all, it should now have free scope. I think when the eternal God sees a poor sinner standing before Himself, and hears him cry, “I am guilty, Lord! I am guilty through and through! I alone am guilty! I have broken Your law! If You destroy me, You are just! My heart is broken because I have sinned. I cannot be more wretched than I am now, for sin is my plague and my misery; and while I confess it, I do not think that my confession has any merit in it. Save me for Jesus’ sake!” “Why, I think,” the mighty God says, “I have brought that soul, through My grace, into a state in which it is ready to receive the precious gift of justification and pardon through the blood of My dear Son.”

See how one grace gives a fitness for another. The sinner is brought to Jesus, his heart is broken, and then, it is ready to be bound up. The penitent sinner has paid honor to the prerogative of the law-giver; he has, as far as he could do so, dethroned the law-giver by his sin—but now, by his confession—he restores Him to His throne. Such a sinner knows the bitterness of sin, and knowing its bitterness, he will hate it for the future. If he is pardoned, he will not go back as the dog to his vomit, or the sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire. This pardoned sinner will not take to himself the credit of having been pardoned by his confessions. He will not go abroad and talk lightly of his sin, he will be sure to speak much of the leniency of the law-giver, and the power of Jesus’ precious blood; he will admire forevermore, even in eternity, the mighty grace which pardoned such as he is. On the other hand, if man were forgiven, and no true penitence worked in him, what would be the result? Why, it would be turning wolves loose upon society! I think if God gave forgiveness to men without working a work of divine grace in them by which they are brought to repentance, it would be offering a premium for sin, it would be breaking down the floodgates which restrain vice, it would be destroying all the excellent fruits which free grace is intended to produce. What? Is the man to be pardoned for all the past, and to remain without repentance for his evil ways? Then will he make the future just as the past has been—no, he will sin with a higher hand, and with a stronger arm—because he sees with what impunity he may rebel! What? Shall a proud, unhumiliated sinner rejoice in the forgiving love of the Father? Then will he arrogantly boast that there was not much evil in his sin after all; he will be no singer to the praise of sovereign grace, but rather, with the boastful lips of the legalist, he will render unto himself praise for the dexterous manner in which he has escaped from the condemnation due to sin. God will give pardon to those only to whom He gives repentance—for it were unsafe to give it elsewhere. God brings us down and lays us in the dust, for then, and only then are we prepared to hear Him say, “Your sins, which are many, are forgiven you.”



I take it for granted, that there are some here who will say, “I wish I could repent. I know that it would not merit eternal life. I understand that faith—faith in Jesus Christ is the way by which I must be saved, but I desire to be humbled on account of sin.” My dear friend, your desire to be humbled may perhaps be an indication that you are already in that condition; but, if you are lamenting your hardness of heart, I will suggest two or three things. Remember *your past sins*. I do not want you to write out a list of them, there is not paper enough in this world for that, but let some of them stand out before your memory, and if they do not make you blush, they ought to do so. Next, think over all *the aggravations of those sins*. Recollect the training you had as a child. You were blessed with godly parents. Remember the providential warnings you received. Think of the light and knowledge against which you have offended; that tenderness of conscience against which you kicked. Then I beg you to consider *against what a God you have offended*—so great, so good, so kind, who has never done you a displeasure, but has been all generosity and kindness to you till this day. Your offenses have been insults against the King of heaven. Your transgressions have been undermining, as far as they could, the throne of the Eternal Majesty.

Look at sin in the light of God, to be humbled. And if this will not do it, let me pray that God the Holy Spirit may take you to *the foot of the cross*. Remember, that in order that sin might be put away, it was necessary that God should be veiled in human flesh. No one else could bear the load of sin but God, and He only could bear it by becoming Man. See the suffering of the Savior when “despised and rejected.” Mark the spitting, the shame, the smiting. Look at His wounds—

*“Count the purple drops, and say,  
Thus must sin be washed away.”*

And surely, if God the Holy Spirit blesses it, such a meditation will make you see the blackness and vileness of sin. John Bradford said that when he was in prayer, he never liked to rise from his knees till he began to feel something of brokenness of heart. Get up to your chamber, then, poor sinner, if you desire to have a broken and contrite spirit, and come not out until you have it! Remember that you will never feel so broken in heart as when you can see Jesus bearing all your sins. *Faith and repentance* are born together, and aid the health of each other—

*“Law and terrors do but harden,  
All the while they work alone;  
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,  
Will dissolve a heart of stone.”*

Go as you are to Christ, and ask Him to give that tenderness of heart which shall be to you the indication that pardon has come; for pardon cannot and will not come unattended by a melting of soul and a hatred of sin. Wrestle with the Lord! Say, “I will not let You go except You bless me.” Get a fast hold upon the Savior by a vigorous faith in His great atonement. Oh, may His Spirit enable you to do this! Say in your soul, “Here I will abide, at the horns of the altar; if I perish I will perish at the foot of the cross. From my hope in Jesus, I will not depart, but I will look up and say, ‘Savior, Your heart was broken for me, break my heart! You were wounded, wound me! Your blood was freely poured forth for me, Lord, let me pour forth my tears that I should have nailed You to the tree. O Lord, dissolve my soul; melt it in tenderness, and You shall be forever praised for making Your enemy Your friend.’”

May God bless you, and make you truly repent if you have not repented; and if you have, may He enable you to continue in it all your days, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

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